

Overseas Press Club Bulletin

VOL. 41, NO. 2
FEBRUARY 1986

52 East 41 Street
New York, N.Y. 10017
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Up-and-Coming

Thursday, Feb. 13, Noon—Thursday Luncheon with Morton Frank and son, Alan, Edward R. Murrow Room.

Thursday, March 6, noon—First Thursday Luncheon with Ansel Talbert, Edward R. Murrow Room.

Tuesday, March 18, 5:30 p.m.—OPC Book Night with Joseph Heller and Speed Vogel, authors of "No Laughing Matter," Bogert Room.

Thursday, April 10, noon—Thursday Luncheon with Faye Gillis Wells, Edward R. Murrow Room.

Luncheons: Members \$16, Guests \$20; 5:30 Programs: Members Free, Guests \$4. Cash bar all functions. Reservations required. Cancellations 48 hours in advance if food served or members will be charged. Reserve with Mary Novick 679-9650.

Book Night Attraction March 18



Joseph Heller (L), Speed Vogel

See "No Laughing Matter," Page 3.

China coverage

As it is...

By H.L. Stevenson

The author, an OPCer, corporate editor of Crain Communications Inc., made his third reporting trip to China late last summer. He was there in 1972 and 1978 as UPI editor-in-chief.

Americans are getting their most comprehensive news coverage from China in more than three decades.

In early 1979, two American reporters arrived in the Communist capital of Beijing, when it was known as Peking, to reopen the UPI and AP bureaus closed when Mao Tse-tung, now known as Mao Zedong, seized power in 1949.

Today, there are 24 representatives of the wire services, major U.S. dailies, magazines and networks, surpassing the Japanese as the largest contingent of journalists in the capital.

The result is a daily flow of information, sometimes a torrent, for the casual reader or viewer as well as the international experts watching for everything from factory statistics to quivers in the high echelons of government.

Despite tight-lipped Chinese bureaucracy, and a state-controlled press, reopening of diplomatic relations between the United States and China seven years ago has provided new and important insight on a country which virtually shunned the world spotlight for years.

For the American reporting from China, life is an endless round of frustrations and contradictions, the need to read numerous Chinese periodicals and monitor broadcast stations with the help of translators provided by the government and regular forays to talk to Chinese citizens in Beijing and elsewhere.

Like foreign diplomats and businessmen, the American reporters are assigned to housing compounds in Beijing. They are restricted in their travel to cities classified as "open." Many others are closed. Airplane or train reservations may take weeks to obtain. Interviews, usually with an interpreter, can require hours to glean small bits of information to fit into the larger mosaic.

Ingenuity pays off for the persistent. When a strong earthquake occurred in the remote Xinjiang area last August, **Ronald Redmond**, UPI's chief Beijing correspondent, was greeted with silence when he sought details from the China Seismological Bureau.

Redmond placed a telephone call to the stricken area and, in a country where routine calls can take hours to complete, got through fairly quickly to local officials who estimated the death toll at about 60, with many injured and heavy destruction.

See Page 2

As it was...

Irene Corbally Kuhn, a founding member of the OPC, recalls the China she covered from 1922 to 1949 as vividly as if it were yesterday.

The tales spilled out: Chiang Kai-Shek, the warlords, the days when Shanghai was "the Paris of the Orient," network broadcasting from her office with a bed-sheet for sound-proofing, how Admiral Kincaid offered her the use of his flagship's radio room on hearing her broadcast appeal that ships relay her weak radio report as Japanese forces closed in on Shanghai.

Her talk to the OPC's First Thursday lunchers was extraordinary. At 88, she is filled with vigor and still hard at work. She remembers it all from when she quit the *Paris Herald-Tribune*, taking a six-week freighter voyage to Shanghai, arriving with \$50 in her pocket, landing a job on the English language *China Press* when she had \$14 left.

She became a correspondent for INS, broadcast for NBC, free-lanced for a score of other major media outlets over the years.

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China Coverage

Now...

From Page 1



H. L. Stevenson

"When we called back the next day, we got nothing," Redmond said. "Somebody in Beijing told them to quit talking to reporters."

Two days later, the official Chinese press was reporting 55 dead and details of the damage, revealing in itself since a few years ago natural disasters, plane crashes and the like were rarely reported to the Chinese media. When questioned about a major earthquake in Central China in the mid-1970s, the head of China's official news agency would not even hint at the death toll. "The rebuilding of the city is the important story," he told visiting American journalists.

The big story in China during the past year has been the country's sweeping economic reforms, which earned Deng Xiaoping *Time's* Man of the Year title. Last summer, Deng steadfastly refused to give the reporters he encountered the slightest clues to the next steps in the program in which China is borrowing heavily from capitalist ways to bolster its economy.

This did not deter **Vigor Fung** of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, who provided an excellent preview in early September, quoting "sources close to his (Deng's) thinking." Just as they do in Washington, underlings in the Chinese government sometimes talk freely as long as they are not quoted by name.

Daniel Southerland of *The Washington Post* has noted that the further away from Beijing a reporter travels many Chinese "speak their minds with astonishing candor."

Southerland, **Joseph Reaves** of *The Chicago Tribune* and other reporters frequently interview Chinese in the streets about their feelings on everything from the U.S. movies shown in the country to the new economic program.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry conducts regular briefings for foreign correspondents, but they tend to focus on routine announcements about "Friendly delegations" coming to visit, and other mundane matters. Reporters can telephone the ministry seeking help.

"Our requests are always politely received," Redmond said. "Sometimes we get an answer, often we do not."

John Burns of *The New York Times* is among the reporters who spend hours studying Chinese statistics on industrial and agricultural output—which the Chinese always lump together in reporting progress. From this, it is clear that the country has made significant strides forward under Deng's more liberalized policies, but still lags far behind many developed nations.

The ability to speak Chinese is essential for the Beijing-based reporters, says **Nate Polowetzky**, assistant general manager for foreign news for the *AP* in New York. "It helps provide a much greater depth to the reporting than just quoting the government announcements," he says.

Polowetzky says the agency's three-person staff, headed by **Jeff Bradley**, can file copy almost instantaneously, direct to New York or via Tokyo which for many years was one of the "China watching" cities where reporters tried to piece together a murky picture of what was happening inside the country.

How do the Chinese view the American reporting from their country?

Veteran Chinese journalist **Peng Di** was generally favorable in evaluating what he saw in U.S. papers while he served as the chief of *Xinhua News Agency* bureau in Washington after the two countries agreed to swap reporters.

Peng said he appreciated the devotion of the Americans in seeking facts and "writing seriously" on events in his country, which he conceded had been shrouded in secrecy and was a "mystery" for many years after Mao Zedong assumed power.

"On the other hand, reports on China by some U.S. journalists appear to be frustrating," Peng wrote in the *Beijing Review* after completing his Washington assignment and returning to Beijing. "They tend to be biased, giving a completely negative picture with little regard of China's historical, cultural and demographic context..."

Peng was harshly critical of the book written by **Fox Butterfield** during his tour as *The New York Times* correspondent, and of *Wall Street Journal* editorials on the Taiwan issue. He said the book and the editorials lacked perspective.

Then...

From Page 1

Some of the story of her life in Shanghai is told in her current article, "Shanghai: The Vintage Years," in the January issue of *Gourmet Magazine*. Editor-in-Chief **Jane Montant** and Executive Editor **Gail Zweigenthal** were on hand for her talk as were leaders of New York's Chinese-American community.

One story above all, she recalled—when during World War II, she was taken to a house some weeks after Doolittle fliers, who had bombed Tokyo, were downed over China.

Over tea, a Japanese officer presented personal effects of one, then the ashes.

"We knew they had been executed but the Japanese denied it," she said. "I carried the ashes in a box on my lap in a rickshaw back to Shanghai" and the protection of the international community.

The terrible experience remains with her. She paused to wipe away tears.

She got the story, though, discovering a calendar scratched on a baseboard in that house, indicating the fliers had been held there and not killed in the crash of their plane as the Japanese claimed.

Never will she go back to mainland China, she said. What was good of the old China, she feels, has been preserved in Taiwan. And there are the memories of so many friends lost.

"But change is constant," she said. The new leadership is trying "and I hope for a China some day united and free."



Irene Corbally Kuhn (R)

(Butterfield's book, *China: Alive in The Bitter Sea*, won OPC's 1982 award for best book on foreign affairs.)

He had praise for *New York Times* reporter **Christopher Wren**, as well as the coverage of the *Baltimore Sun*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, *Christian Science Monitor* and the wire services.

Keep in touch!

Your fellow members want to know where you are, how you are and what you are doing. We want to tell them in the OPC Bulletin. Keep the notes and cards coming. Feel free to let us know how we might improve The Bulletin.

Reminder

Material for the bulletin must be received in the OPC Office by the 14th of the month preceding publication.

Peoplers

We need more members like this: **Ellen Wallace** writes to complain about not getting her '85 dues bill; incidentally reports she's just back from three-month Canton-to-Peking (plus side trips) journey—by bicycle! Did three-parter on China observations for *Christian Science Monitor*, a piece on *National Public Radio* forthcoming. China, she says, is "wonderful, fascinating, beautiful—and exhausting." We'd agreed even before she said temps were in 100-degree range.

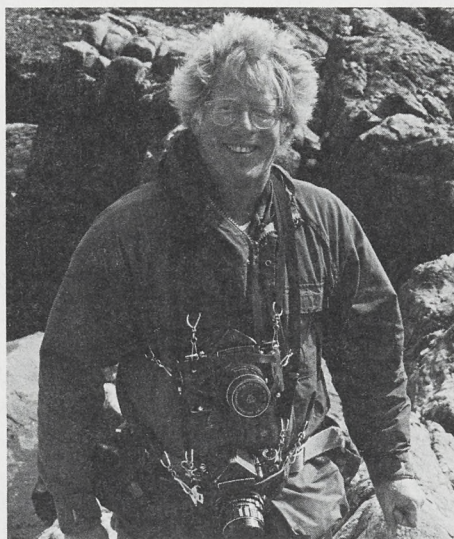
Marty Sheridan, 40 years an OPCer, now retired (HE says), writes from Evanston, Ill., home that his first book, *Comics and Their Creators*, published in '42, is in third reprint (and he forgot to mention the publisher). He's still doing some writing including travel pieces—Gibraltar, Australia, Mallorca in '85. He started collecting comic art and editorial cartoons when he was assistant at *King Features* on *Tillie The Toiler* strip. He's putting collection up for auction for Guernsey's in New York in mid-February.

OPCer **Marguerite Vauclair** reports from LA she's hooked up with the *Los Angeles Times Syndicate* as promotion manager. Small World Dept.: LATS editor Dan Byrne, contender in '82-'83 when she covered round-the-world, singlehanded sail, has moved into house around corner from hers, occupied her office before her.

OPCer **Sven Erik Bergh** has cranked up U.S. publishing company in addition to his operations in Switzerland, West Germany, Spain and Sweden. *Bergh Publishing Group Inc.*, with distribution by *E. P. Dutton*, is coming out here in April with French best seller *Call Me Scarlett* already tagged for Franco-U.S. TV series.

WANTED: Fulltime editor for small, successful Massachusetts weekly, experienced, mature. All replies confidential. Write Box 83, c/o OPC.

OPC exhibits photos of late Charles Pratt



Charles Pratt

Charles Pratt was a Broadway stage manager for a dozen years before finding his calling in photography.

Pratt, whose work is on exhibit in the OPC through February, turned from the theater to professional photography and, in the 16 years before his death at 50 in 1976, became known for photos remarkable for "straight-forwardness, honesty and plainness," wrote Jane Livingston.

Pratt's work today is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum and in some of the best known private collections.

OPCer **Elaine Bissell**, marking 30th year with *Gannett-Westchester Newspapers*, out with new novel, *Family Fortunes*, already highly praised. "Contemporary romance with the social conscience," says *Publisher's Weekly*. *Library Journal* recommends it as "entertaining, fast paced," etc. Elaine, Westchester papers' lifestyles editor until last year, now is restaurant critic, columnist, feature writer, working out of her Southbury, CT, home. She calls it her third major novel noting she wrote four others, historical novels titled *The American Dream*, under maiden name, Whitney Faulkner. She proudly adds, two of three daughters are in the theater and one is an arts editor for Northeast Publications at Rutgers.

OPC staff, **Mary Novick**, Manager, and **Anthony Muraco**, Bookkeeper, thank OPCers for their generosity in contributing to the employees Christmas fund and Chemists' Club employees also thank OPCers for contribution to their fund.

It's "No Laughing Matter," what Heller and Vogel say

For the OPC March 18 Book Night, **Joseph Heller**, and **Speed Vogel** will discuss a subject that is *No Laughing Matter*, Heller's bout with Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

"When they name any disease after two guys, it's got to be terrible," said author Mario Puzo—one anecdote from the new Heller-Vogel book (Putnam), which by all accounts defeats the title with laughter.

With Heller, author of *Catch-22* and *God Knows*, helpless from the paralyzing disease, his longtime friend, Vogel, pitched in to help him through the ordeal and then to defeat pathos with wit in writing the story.

OPC Book Night, Tuesday, March 18, Bogert Room, 5:30 p.m. Members Free, Guests \$4, Cash Bar. Reserve with Mary Novick.

Indomitable Ruth

We have a nice note from **Bradley D. Nash**, mayor of historic Harpers Ferry, W. Va., husband of longtime OPCer **Ruth Cowan Nash**, one of the pioneer newswomen who told their experiences for a National Press Club survey.

"Ruth would write herself but has an eye impairment," Nash writes. He passes along a **Sarah McClendon** column from the Toledo Blade which tells about **Doris Fleeson**, **Pauline Frederick**, **Jessica Savitch**, **Nancy Dickerson** and, most prominently, about Ruth Cowan.

"Ruth Baldwin Cowan of San Antonio recalls what an unending struggle it was for women to get into news reporting anywhere. She worked in Austin as head of the United Press bureau under the name Baldwin until a UP official called long distance and asked to speak to the bureau head. When he discovered that Baldwin was a woman, she was fired immediately. She then persuaded the Associated Press to take her on, where she remained for many years.

"When Ruth Cowan came to Washington, she tried to cover the presidential press conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt, but met such strong opposition that she appealed to Eleanor Roosevelt."

Eleanor started "for women only" news conferences which made big news, Sarah McClendon reports.

"Ruth Cowan was one of a number of women war correspondents in World War II who had a rough time even staying in Europe. Ruth always was on the verge of being sent home when officials found her interviewing top generals, Bradley included," Ms. McClendon writes.

1st Thursdays: To top Frank & Son, Try Talbert, Wells

What do you do to top Morton Frank and son, Alan, who headed this month's Thursday lunches bill?

Lunch committee chairman Hester Hensell knows. She's got THE Ansel Talbert lined up for March and THE Faye Gillis Wells coming in in April, all in the wake of THE Irene Corbally Kuhn, whose talk is reported elsewhere in this issue.

Talbert is the aviation writer who did a few little things like flying over both North and South Poles third. Admiral Byrd went first.

Talbert did the Ice Island float up to the North Pole with 10 Air Force volunteers and a husky dog named Poncho.

He did it all for adventure, aviation and *The New York Herald-Tribune*. But he'd rather tell of his big beat, "my single-handed expose of Dr. Kurt Rieth, whom the U.S. Department of Justice identified as the Number One Nazi Agent in the Western Hemisphere."

To find out what happened to Rieth and then to the Talbert-exposed Vichy ambassador to Washington in those neutral 1940 days, you'd best attend the lunch March 6.

Faye Gillis Wells is that aviatrix we mentioned, discoursing on the committee to pick the first journalist NASA's sending in space. We failed to make the connection but she also is a founding member of the OPC and one of the original organizers, with Amelia Earhart, of the 99s, the women pilots' organization.

Mostly we were knocking the poor press release put out by the J-school crowd, who didn't bother to mention Ms Wells is as well known as a writer-reporter and newscaster as she is a pilot.

She remembers the Algonquin Hotel meeting of 13 people April 10, 1939, at which the OPC was organized. She's squeezing in her New York visit between appearances in Michigan, Kansas, Texas and, by the way, New Delhi.

Dateline '86

OPC Dateline Magazine Publisher Henry Gellermann says the drive is on to make this year's *Terrorism and the Media* issue the best ever.

Gellermann wants suggestions and contacts for prospective advertisers to support the pages necessary to properly treat the subject.

Act now. Time is short for inclusion in the issue distributed coincident with the annual OPC Awards Dinner in April.

Rate cards and related material are available through the club office.

OPC's 'Nam reunion

Al Kaff and Bryce Miller need the help of OPCers in planning a reunion of Vietnam correspondents and of government and military people involved in the coverage. Call the OPC with suggestions and contacts. Let us know if you can work on it.

Overseas Press Club Bulletin

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